Health Human Resources
Action Plan

NOVA SCOTIA
Health

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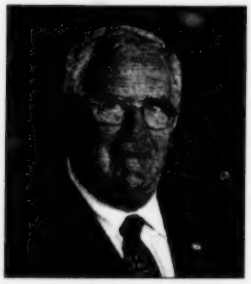

Angus MacIsaac, Minister

Message from the Minister and Deputy Minister of Health

Cheryl Doiron, Deputy Minister

In Nova Scotia, we are fortunate to have more than 30,000 dedicated and talented health-care professionals. Many of these professionals were trained in Nova Scotia, while others were trained in other Canadian provinces or across the globe. They are involved in a range of health care services offered in facilities, community settings, nursing homes, and in people's homes.

We are experiencing an aging population and workforce, increases in chronic disease, improved treatments, shortages of certain health professionals, and an increased desire among these professionals to have a "balanced lifestyle." These factors create challenges within the health system to sustain an adequate supply of service professionals to meet the health needs of the population, now and in the future.

These challenges are felt not only in Nova Scotia, but across the country.

Under the 2004 First Ministers' Meeting Accord, "10-Year Plan to Strengthen Health Care," provinces and territories agreed to increase the supply of health professionals and to make action plans public. The plans, to be released by December 31, 2005, are to include targets for the training, recruitment and retention of professionals.

We are pleased to share Nova Scotia's Action Plan for Health Human Resources with Nova Scotians. This plan is an important first step in the development of a comprehensive health human resource strategy for the province.

Successful planning and implementation to strengthen our health care workforce will depend on the involvement of key stakeholders. By working with district health authorities, employers, educators, other provinces, unions, regulatory bodies, health professionals, and others, we will be able to identify population health needs and determine the right mix of health professionals needed now and in years to come.

Nova Scotia has experience in developing successful plans. Data shows that the Nursing Strategy introduced in 2001 has resulted in more nurses working today, compared to 2001. In 2005, 141 nurses relocated to Nova Scotia from other provinces and 30 nurses relocated to Nova Scotia from outside of Canada, a significant increase from 2001. Since 2002, Nova Scotia has provided funding for 172 registered nurses to re-enter the profession. As well, more nurses are employed in full-time permanent positions versus casual positions. Nova Scotia is currently retaining over 80 per cent of new graduates, 90 per cent of whom have found full-time employment.

While we have seen success with the nursing profession to date, there is much more to be done. Across the country, several health care professions have been identified as currently or potentially in short supply, including medical laboratory technologists, medical radiation therapists, pharmacists, nurses (registered nurses, licensed practical nurses and specialty nurses), and physicians (rural and some specialties). Our efforts will focus on these professions and others for the purposes of health human resource planning.

Achievements to Date

In recent years, we have worked with our health partners across the province to increase the number and type of health professionals (see Appendix A), improve work environments, introduce new ways of delivering health care, and address population health status. Some examples of these initiatives are shared below.

- We have purchased 50 seats for a two-year training program for medical laboratory technologists at New Brunswick Community College. Students receive a $4,000 bursary for each year. In exchange, students sign a return-in-service agreement to work in Nova Scotia for two years following graduation.

- Bursaries are being provided to nursing homes and home support agencies to help recruit prospective continuing care assistants. Individuals can apply for these bursaries directly through these agencies. The bursary offers tuition for study in return for employment with the agency that provided the bursary. Approximately $730,000 has been allocated over the last two years.

- We funded 25 paramedics to return to school for advanced care paramedic training in 2003-04. Forty paramedics were funded to receive this training in 2004-05.

- Since 2001, we have dedicated $10 million annually to a comprehensive provincial nursing strategy for nurse education, recruitment, retention and workforce renewal. Recognized as one of the best health human resource strategies in the country, this strategy was designed by and for nurses.

- The nursing strategy offers programs to support employers in their recruitment and retention efforts, including funding for orientation, continuing education, bursaries, cooperative education program, re-entry, relocation, recruitment websites and job fairs, nursing grants and leadership development. This year, $300,000 is being targeted to attract and retain nurses in rural communities.

- In 2004, 238 more licensed practical nurses and registered nurses were employed than in 2002. Since 2002, Nova Scotia has achieved its target of retaining at least 80 per cent of its new graduates.

- $7.1 million was committed to train 240 more nurses over a four-year period beginning in 2003. This means 60 additional nurses are being trained each year.

- The province is making available 55 bursaries for nursing students in their final year of a four-year program who agree to sign a one-year return-in-service agreement with an eligible employer.

- Starting 2003-04, the number of undergraduate seats at Dalhousie University, Faculty of Medicine was increased by eight at a cost of $450,000 annually. The number of undergraduate seats is now 90.

- We have led the country in offering alternative ways to pay physicians. This approach has been helpful in recruiting specialty, academic and rural physicians.

- We offer a variety of activities and incentive programs to recruit physicians. These include debt assistance, alternative payments, job fairs, site visits, relocation allowances, Maritime Physician Recruitment Initiative, and continuing medical education funding.

- We have been meeting and consulting with various physician groups over the past two years to anticipate and plan for future needs for each physician specialty.

- The province created a new physician contract in support of the new Clinician Assessment for Practice Program, developed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia. The program assesses internationally trained family physicians residing in Canada to determine who is ready for practice under the supervision of local physicians. Eleven physicians were placed in communities in the fall 2005.

- The federal government is making available $2.76 million dollars over the next five years for Nova Scotia activities that integrate internationally educated health professionals into the healthcare workforce. We have submitted several projects, in collaboration with our partners, to be considered for this funding.

Health System Changes

- We have been working to enhance public access to a wider range of healthcare services in communities. Community-based, collaborative healthcare teams with nurse practitioners were initiated in 2001 when the government changed legislation. Four pilot sites under the Strengthening Primary Care Initiative tested this model of care. Funding is now in place for 19 nurse practitioners working in collaborative practices with family physicians.

- The 2005-06 provincial budget also provided funding to expand primary healthcare teams that could include nurse pratitioners and other professionals.

- To help transition healthcare professionals to this new model of care, a new federally funded initiative will allow the Atlantic provinces to develop and deliver training for those who work in primary healthcare teams.

Population Health

- Nova Scotia Health Promotion was created in December 2002 to give greater focus to improving the health of Nova Scotians. Today, it has a $3.7 million annual budget and focuses on six key areas of health: addiction prevention, healthy eating, healthy sexuality, injury prevention, physical activity, and tobacco control.

- An example of its work to positively impact health status is the declining smoking rate in Nova Scotia. The 2004 smoking rate was at 20 per cent, a decline from 30 per cent in 2000. That represents about 78,000 fewer Nova Scotians smoking in 2004 than 2000.

Action Plan

We are working to ensure people have access to appropriate, effective, efficient, sustainable, responsive, needs-based healthcare services and that healthcare professionals have a supportive, satisfying work environment.

Nova Scotia's health human resource strategy will incorporate the following principles:

- Health human resource planning shall be culturally sensitive, evidence based, outcomes directed, and responsive to healthcare renewal and changes in system design.

- Our approach will provide a flexible healthcare workforce that has the knowledge, skills and attributes to work in a quality-driven, innovative, cost-effective, interdisciplinary environment.

- We will support the provision of a safe and healthy workplace that will actively engage educators, employers, unions, funders, researchers and professionals in the planning process.

- We will build on the effective leadership that exists throughout the healthcare system.

Nova Scotia's planning will include

- reviewing the health needs and service requirements of the population
- examining supply and distribution of health professionals in each occupational category
- considering the changing skills, roles and scopes of practice of various health professionals
- addressing quality of work life
- examining service delivery models

Nova Scotia's Action Plan is based on four goals derived from the Pan-Canadian HHR Planning Framework, which was approved by federal, provincial, and territorial Ministers of Health in October 2005.

The following tables highlight examples of work and desired outcomes for each goal. While many of these actions are standing government commitments, others will be implemented as new funding becomes available. As planning continues, additional strategies will be identified to support the provincial health human resource strategy.

Goal 1

TO IMPROVE NOVA SCOTIA'S CAPACITY TO PLAN FOR THE OPTIMAL NUMBER, MIX, AND DISTRIBUTION OF HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS BASED ON SYSTEM DESIGN, SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS AND POPULATION HEALTH NEEDS.

Highlighted Actions

- The recently completed Atlantic Health Human Resource Planning Study and simulation model will help inform policies to determine the right number and right mix of healthcare professionals now and into the future.
- A health human resource planning registry is being established to assist planners in identifying all health care professionals working in Nova Scotia as well as the type of work they do.
- The health services placement network is a web-based tool that will streamline clinical placements for health care trainees in the community, making our training process more effective.
- Consultations with key stakeholders will continue, ensuring that a full plan to address population health needs and service delivery will be developed.

Goal 2

TO ENHANCE NOVA SCOTIA'S CAPACITY TO WORK WITH EMPLOYERS, EDUCATORS AND OTHERS TO DEVELOP A WORKFORCE THAT HAS THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES TO PROVIDE SAFE, HIGH QUALITY CARE AND WORK IN INNOVATIVE ENVIRONMENTS THAT RESPOND TO CHANGING HEALTHCARE SYSTEMS AND POPULATION HEALTH NEEDS.

Highlighted Actions

- Continue work on various projects addressing health and workplace issues.
- Use innovative approaches to keep Nova Scotia youth in the province by introducing the Allied Health Care Career Counseling for Middle Schools initiative. This will target students in grade nine, introducing them to career opportunities in health care.
- Introduce a Prior Learning Assessment for continuing care assistants that will assess and credential individuals who have been working in the field already or those who have been internationally trained and want to become a continuing care assistant in Nova Scotia.
- The Academic Health Council is a group comprised of the CEO's from the province's nine district health authorities and the IWK Health Centre, as well as the Deans of Health Science Faculties in Nova Scotia. This council is in place to address workplace issues and clinical training placements.

Goal 3

To deploy the healthcare workforce in service delivery models that make full use of their skills.

Highlighted Actions

- Continue to investigate alternative models of care and practice teams of health care professionals that can better meet the health needs of the population.
- Continue to develop the role of nurse practitioners in Nova Scotia as a primary health care professional.
- Nova Scotia's Nursing Action Plan includes: creating a stable, adequate supply of nurses and improve work environments that maximize patient, nurse, and system outcomes; implement effective and efficient mechanisms to address staffing and workload issues; enhance data collection capabilities; expand clinical education, and provide opportunities for interdisciplinary education.

Goal 4

To enhance Nova Scotia's capacity to build and maintain a sustainable workforce in healthy safe environments.

Highlighted Actions

- Develop a medical laboratory technology training program in Nova Scotia.
- Increase the number of undergraduate medical seats and future residency seats.
- Continue to support the Clinician Assessment for Practice Program. Funds from Health Canada will help to develop an evaluation for the program.
- Nova Scotia has been awarded funds by Health Canada for a Health Workplace project in Annapolis Valley.
- The Health Human Resource Sector Council has done a study on recruitment and retention strategies in the district health authorities. We look forward to recommendations that will be developed to help ensure that we are keeping our valued healthcare professionals and effectively encouraging others to join our workforce.

Conclusion

Planning for future health human resources is complex and dynamic.

Healthcare planners and professionals across the country are challenged to leave to future generations a healthcare system that is sustainable, that meets the health needs of communities, and that is satisfying for health professionals. Committed to meet this challenge head on, we will work cooperatively with our partners to find innovative ways to measure population health needs, establish appropriate healthcare service delivery models, and build and maintain a healthy workforce in Nova Scotia.

Consultations with many of our partners will begin in 2006 to help develop detailed plans and comprehensive strategies for the future.

Appendix A

List of Health Care Professionals in Nova Scotia

- Audiologists
- Chiropractors
- Continuing Care Assistants
- Personal Care Workers
- Home Support Workers
- Dental Assistants
- Dental Hygienists
- Dental Technicians
- Dentists
- Denturists
- Dietitians
- Health Record Administrators/Technicians
- Health Service Managers
- Licensed Practical Nurses
- Massage Therapists
- Medical Laboratory Technologists
- Medical Radiation Technologists
- Medical Radiation Therapists
- Nurse Practitioners
- Occupational Therapists
- Opticians
- Optometrists
- Paramedics
- Pharmacists
- Physicians
- Physiotherapists
- Psychologists
- Recreational Therapists
- Registered Nurses
- Respiratory Therapists
- Speech Language Pathologists
- Social Workers
- Sonographers